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THE WOMAN WITH EMPTY HANDS

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The Woman With Empty Hands

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

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SUFFRAGETTE PARADE PASSING ALONG MADISON SQUARE
TOWARDS FIFTH AVENUE

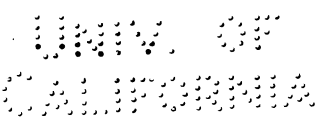
THE WOMAN WITH EMPTY HANDS

The Evolution of a Suffragette

FRONTISPIECE

Marion Hamilton Carter

New York
Dodd, Mead and Company
1913



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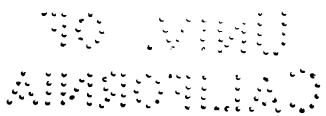

To

MRS. PANKHURST
AND HER DAUGHTERS

259929

The Woman With Empty Hands

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I

"How did you—you of all women—ever become a Suffragette?"

The words, in tones of sad indignation, were flung into my face at a street corner by a friend I had not seen for years, and his reproaching eyes and the entire pose of his lank body said what his tongue was too polite to utter—that he was cruelly disappointed in me; that I had fallen in his esteem and carried down with me many of his cherished ideals.

He was a Southern gentleman of the old school, chivalrous and elderly, and

I, once a respected and admired young friend, now stood with my character displayed in glaring colours at a wind-swept curb on lower Broadway, doing my humble duty for the Great Cause, crying out to passers-by: "'The Woman Voter'!—here. Buy a 'Voter'? Votes for Women!" and offering the sheet with an ingratiating smile. Not recognising him at the moment I had addressed him unawares—of all men I should have chosen to avoid, for I knew in advance what I'd be likely to get from him!

"You, —— ——," calling me by my maiden name, "to be doing this on the street! Your father's and mother's daughter——"

Words failed him at the thought of my parents, and he had time to take in a little more of me while I stopped the conversation to sell a paper and pocket the nickel. At which he became aghast and told me so.

And yet the way he measured the gulf he thought I'd fallen into from a previous lofty estate, measured for me the heights to which I thought I'd risen from a lowly one! So little do even the most chivalrous men know the inner workings of woman's psychology. Only later, after I had explained to his exasperated ears and he had left me to my fate—since I would have none of his advice to return to "woman's proper sphere, shedding abroad the beneficent

influence of the home"—I thought over the pictures he must have been carrying of me in his mind all those years: To him I stood as the daughter of an esteemed old Virginia family; the youthful centre of attention and gaiety; the bride, staid and serious under her new responsibilities; the mother, holding a child to him for his inspection, listening with bright eyes as he exclaimed: "Another Southern gentleman to carry on our traditions!" and acquiescing.

And then—to find me selling papers on the street and drumming up votes for women besides! No wonder it shocked the dear old gentleman's finer sensibilities and outraged all his preconceived ideals of womanhood! Poor

man! He died a few months later, and I never saw him again, so he never had the gleam of an understanding of the true inwardness of my conversion, or what it brought me to;—he saw only the surface—bad enough in all conscience, according to his way of thinking—but he did not know that the real change in me was so great that when my mind harked back to the days when he knew me, those early years felt like another incarnation in another world.

That world!—so conventional; so serene; so sheltered and secure; so good, as the world reckons good; and—so *smug*. Truly, without exaggeration, I think I must have been the smuggest

young thing in Richmond, and everybody took it as a matter of course that a girl in my position should be. And oh, how beautifully satisfied I was with the easy way of thousands of my class—making a man and child happy; and on suitable, and strictly conventional occasions, making happy a choice, small circle of friends—"shedding abroad the influence of home"—and giving nothing but passing thoughts to anything outside my little fenced-in life. Just that for eight blessed years; not a sickness; not a worry; not even one small cloud of domestic misunderstanding to dim the glamour;—eight years steeped in affection and appreciation from the two I held most dear. And

then within twenty-four hours of each other both husband and child were stricken with scarlet fever in its worst form.

The man died; the child lived only by a miracle. But little more than his bare life remained in my keeping, for he was left with kidney trouble that developed into diabetes. It is a disease almost invariably fatal to a child, and the doctor warned me that except for a second miracle the end was not far off.

I must work that miracle. Terrible as it was to lose my husband, I had no time for thought of myself or for grief. The boy claimed all of me. Every mouthful of food he ate had to be

especially prepared. It was prepared by his mother's hands and hers alone. None other seemed good enough, or devoted enough to touch it. Everything that was done for him, except his washing, was done by me, and it simply never occurred to me to relieve my burdens by calling a trained nurse. I bought every book on nursing published, and with the doctor's help became an expert myself. Such was the stuff in me when put to the test.

For more than two years I kept my boy with me. I was nurse, cook, comforter, entertainer, playmate, mother, rolled into one, and my supreme reward was that he could not bear me out of his sight. The last year of it I never knew

what it was to have two consecutive hours of rest, and I rejoiced in my service of love and wished I might find means to give him more. My own life contained but a single object —my boy's life; and to it I devoted every waking hour and my dreams.

She may expect it hourly for years, but a mother is never prepared for the death of her only son—no warning can prepare for the loosing of the elemental ties; and during those years of nursing I had formed no conception of what it would mean when my child was no longer with me.

The end came suddenly at dawn. Nature found me numb with long watch-

ing and mercifully left me so. While the small wasted body lay in its narrow satin bed there was still something for my hands to do—flowers to arrange, little nothings here and there. I shed no tears; not even as the falling earth drummed the last roll-call on the casket that numbered him irrevocably with the shadows of memory. "Dust to dust—," the words struck no answering spark in my intelligence, he was mine through so inalienable a right to him.

All was over and I was still numb. I slept a drugged sleep that night, rose early as I had for so long and hurried with my clothes, brushing my hair with rapid strokes before the glass, yet hardly noticing myself.

A voice spoke: "Why are you hurrying so?"

With poised, uplifted arm stopped in mid-air, my mind repeated to myself: "Why are you hurrying so? What have you to hurry for? *No one needs you now!*"

The brush clattered to the floor. I stood there, petrified. I looked at my hands—my empty hands—and the words burst from me aloud, "No one needs me now!"

God! The horror of that revelation! It enveloped me in a clammy wind from a land of uttermost desolation. I felt the dew spring out on my forehead. I stared at my face in the glass and asked it, "Is that you?—the wife—the

mother—the woman that nobody in the wide world needs any more?" and I answered, "Nobody in all this world needs my willing hands to serve; nobody needs my love."

Until that hour hell had been only a word to me, sin but little more. I had listened, with somewhat incredulous ears, to those of the more emotional religious faiths who experienced what they called "the conviction of sin," or "conversion," and wondered what they meant.

I understood now, for in that moment I experienced a "conviction," not of sin that could be atoned for and laid aside by the grace of God, but of something deeper even than sin, appalling

in its dreariness, irrevocable to the end of me—the conviction of utter uselessness. My work was done, and I still in the prime of life! All my ability as nurse and mother, all my stories, my songs and verses, all the amusements, the toys I had learned to make out of paper, all my gifts of cheer and comfort were no better than so much human waste. For now no little hands would reach out—"Oh, mamma! Give me!" —when soldiers, horses, Indians or funny animals grew under my deft scissors; no little eyes would sparkle with the light of fairyland because of me. All was over.

I heard myself whisper: "Now I know there is a hell and it is this des-

olation. Life has cast me out. Nobody needs me, and yet I am denied death that I may follow my husband and son. But even they do not need me now!"

I felt as if I were sinking—or, rather, I had a feeling as if some deep, supporting tide of inner warmth, will, energy slowly forsook me, melted out of my flesh and very bones and oozed away. It was like a subterranean spring whose existence I for the first time became conscious of through its sudden absence. A sense of cessation took possession of me—the whole interior machinery of my being appeared stopped at once. The voice was right—why should I hurry? Why should I even dress, now

or ever again? Why go through all the meaningless antics of a meaningless day? Why even live? Why—O Lord! —let me not depart in peace, the woman with the empty hands?

How long I remained standing in this strange mental condition—this sense of illumination on life's austere, unmitigated meanings—I do not know. Katie, the maid, knocked. I heard without being able to tell myself what the sound was. Then she called my name in frightened tones and asked if I were awake.

Awake! I opened the door and stared at her. She said breakfast "was waiting this long time"—would I like a tray brought up, perhaps? I felt her

anxious, sympathetic eyes studying me from head to foot. She had been with me a long time and loved me as much as a maid can love a mistress. I answered I'd be down presently, and she went away, troubled and perplexed. She pitied me, but she could not understand; yet in all that great city she was the one person who had a heartfelt interest in me, and she was nothing of mine! In a month she would be married and go away with her man.

The thought came to me: "This is a large world with millions of people. How grotesque it would be if there is no one in it who needs just me. There must be some one, somewhere." The idea spurred me. Again I hurried with

my dressing. I would find that some one who needed me.

After I had eaten I went out and walked. I looked for young children of my boy's age, but there seemed to be none roaming the streets. I suppose they were in school. Mothers with little children I passed quickly—they did not need me.

I went into a department store. Polite clerks asked: "Anything I can show you, madam?" One, I remember, said: "Here's the very latest in fancy hose—special sale to-day!"

My face must have frightened her, for she murmured a hasty apology and sidled off. They wanted my money, not me. I was nothing to them; they

had their own lives and friends, mothers and sweethearts. Millions of busy, happy people in those great stores, buying and selling, looking and pricing, calculating and desiring, endlessly surging to and fro in the search for things, but there was no tiny corner for me in their intimacies.

I returned to the street. A Salvation Army lassie passed—a little, austere figure that seemed to say, "All these things for which you people struggle, surging to and fro, are but vanity of the flesh and joyless mockery of the spirit. Think of the souls to save!"

Ah, she could help me! She could tell me where to find some one who

needed just me! I turned and looked after her, but long before I had made up my mind to speak she was out of sight.

I passed a Catholic church and saw a woman entering. She was shabby and poor and old. Didn't she need a friend? Or was she finding all she needed behind that swinging door? Perhaps—who knew?—I might find something there. I walked around the block twice; then slowly followed the woman into the hushed silence.

She was kneeling, telling her beads before a picture of the Mater Dolorosa. I knelt beside her and my heart cried out: "O Mother of Sorrows, you, too, knew the meaning of empty hands!"

And this woman beside me in rusty widow's weeds, were her hands empty? I could not bear it and went out hastily without speaking.

II

LOOKING back over that and the days immediately following, I seem to have lived in a sort of dream of emotional revelation on all life's subtler values—an unnatural state of vision in which my will was almost paralysed. I longed to talk with some one and pour out the thoughts seething in me, and it seemed as if that were all I required to bring me back to normal consciousness; yet I could not force myself to speak, and even the few friends who called to offer condolences I denied myself to. The shock of the conviction

that my work was done, coming on me in that frightfully sudden way, had broken my nerve. With the supreme reason for doing everything swept away at a blow, there seemed no reason for doing anything; and the more I looked about me, the less I saw in life for me.

I did not then appreciate that I was suffering from the universal malady of all souls risen above the plane of animal enjoyments when brought face to face with the stern verities of loss and grief, of life in terms of the irrevocable. Oh, if I could bring back just one hour of the blessed time when some one belonged to me! Yet with a whole worldful of people I was as much alone as if I were the last woman.

Now for the first time I began to realise the loss of my husband. When he died I felt as if I only packed my grief up temporarily, as one lays aside clothing too heavy for the season, but keeps it ready to hand against a fitting opportunity; for I had never wished my boy to fall under the shadow of sorrow and had never put on mourning; —indeed, I do not think he ever knew that his father was what the world calls dead. In the early days of his sickness nothing, of course, was said before the child; later, when he began to ask, I told him that his father had been very sick and had had to take a long vacation in a beautiful place where we should some day join him. He seemed

happy in the thought and eager to be "well enough to go, too," and I left it that way. Little by little the subject dropped; we sank into a quiet sense of waiting that needed no discussion until the time came.

Now that the waiting was over I felt I owed it as a wifely duty to clothe myself in widow's mourning and show the proper outward signs of grief. With this change came the tremendous realisation: *The world is so full of widows.*

Never had I dreamed how many there were—how many of *us!* Everywhere—*everywhere*—all over the wide earth, in all walks of life—widows! Thousands and tens of thousands of us widows!

I now walked the streets constantly; nothing else distracted or interested me; and I was always watching for widows. Women in mourning fascinated me. I sometimes followed them for blocks—to their very doors, perhaps—longing to speak to them; to ask if their loss had been as great as mine; if it had meant all, all, all of life, the curtain dropped and the lights out; if anything had helped them bear it when it came; if they had since found anything worth while. But I never spoke. Convention held me silent.

The world was so full of widows: This thought—or revelation, if you will —was what actually laid the foundation for my becoming a suffragist, because

it initiated a vital change in my whole mental attitude and horizon. My outlook on the world widened. A new appreciation arose in me, a new sense of sisterhood quite distinct from my previous feelings regarding women. For the very first time in my life I became conscious of an idea held in common with other women, and I came to the realisation of a class of women—widows—through being one of the sorrowers myself.

To men, I fear, this will seem very far-fetched; but men so seldom understand that woman is by nature an individualist. She meets her world always in terms of "you and me." The gang instinct in boys has but a feeble

echo in her school days; and later, the home encases her with its multitudinous —and always individual—duties and claims to her attention. Perhaps if she had her children half a dozen at a time she would get some idea of a squad at work or play, of a group with common elements, concerted activities and aims; but every member of her household is of different age and must be met with different treatment, often with different food, mealtimes, bedtimes, clothing and regulations at large. Her relations are thus all private and intimate if she lives the average life of a woman in the average home. Only the college women among my own set seem to develop a consciousness of *class* as distinct from *per-*

sons, an idea of a body of people united by common ties and acting as one.

I cannot too strongly say it, that my feelings during this second period—I call it "the widow stage" of my evolution—were so different from my former self up to the time my boy died that I noted them with positive surprise. The weirdest ideas now took possession of me. If I saw a widow who looked as if she had been one a long time, I felt I wanted her to comfort me; or, if she seemed to be fresh to it, I longed to put my arms around her and comfort her. Then again I thought: Suppose I were to give a huge reception to widows only and we all told our ex-

periences; or: Suppose we formed a club, with a Ways and Means Committee to take charge of the new ones and show them how to get back to life when three-quarters of them is buried. And then the widows that have been left poor to struggle with life, not knowing how to meet it alone—my heart went out especially to them, for I had been left comparatively rich. I had money for the visible decencies of mourning, leisure for the decencies of grief. It would be part of my new sisterhood's work to provide mourning and the wherewithal for a little space of sorrow's leisure to those who must toil incessantly for bread, with not an hour for the deep things of the heart.

Remember—the idea of *suffrage* never once entered my head! Yet in this feeling of sisterhood I was slowly preparing for it, for, strange though it may seem, those morbid, tear-stained days were, nevertheless, days of tremendous inner growth, of quickening of the spirit by a single word, as new in my existence as if dropped out of heaven—Sisterhood.

The other day I came across a passage in William James's *Memories and Studies* that expresses what I mean:

"Some thoughts act almost like mechanical centres of crystallization; facts cluster of themselves about them. Such a thought was that of the gradual growth of all things by natural processes out of natural antecedents. Until the mid-

dle of the nineteenth century no one had grasped it *wholesale.*"

I had grasped the idea of women wholesale; not yet all women—that was coming by a process of "crystallisation"; but a large class of women. Nor had I submerged the sense of social distinctions, so much keener in women than in men, in the greater sense of the Common Good of all women—a sense so large and thrilling it was presently to sweep me off my feet and carry me, through undreamed-of emotions, into undreamed-of appreciations.

III

How small a circumstance determines a life's trend when the auspicious hour arrives! My new trend was given me by four men, running. They elbowed me; one flung me roughly out of his way. A hand caught me as I was falling. A pleasing voice asked, "Are you hurt?"

I thanked the voice, and looked into a pair of very beautiful grey eyes under a fluff of auburn hair.

Next: "Buy a 'Voter'?" asked the pleasing voice, and the rescuing hand held a paper toward me. "I'm sure

you're interested in votes for women. This is our official organ."

I recoiled. Votes for women! I "interested" in the shrieking sisterhood? Heaven forbid! But since the little lady had saved me a possible broken bone or two by her prompt action at a critical moment, I was bound to be civil; so I shook my head and replied politely:

"I'm afraid I'm not interested. I'm a Virginian, and you know we Southern women are brought up to believe a woman's place is in her home. We think if she takes proper care of that and her husband and children, she has her hands full enough with the duties God has called her to."

"Yes, of course she has," admitted

the voice just as politely, and I was given a charming smile. "We believe that too—if a woman has a home. If she has a husband and children and work enough to occupy her from morning till night, she isn't called to active work in the suffrage movement.

"But, you see, thousands of women haven't homes—not as you understand the word. Their homes are dark tenements, attics, cellars; they have drunken husbands, ragged children, and not even sufficient food to feed them. We feel called on to help those just because we have comfortable homes.

"And then there are the tens of thousands of matrimonially superfluous women—who is to look after their in-

terests if they don't do it themselves? Did you know that in Massachusetts alone there are thirty thousand more women of marriageable age than men—women who can't have husbands there simply because there aren't husbands enough to go round?

"Still, if your husband and children take all your time, don't you see you can help us in other ways? We need every woman we can get to join the ranks of those demanding the suffrage."

My husband and children! I left her hastily. I almost ran away from her. The irony of my words! The banality of my argument! Parrotlike, I had repeated the man-made platitude of a bygone generation on the "home and mak-

ing some good man happy"—I, who hadn't so much as a parrot to make happy with a crust!

I found myself presently at the Battery, looking into the water, listening to the plash-plash of little wavelets telling me the futility of my life and its specious arguments. I was ashamed then of the way I had deceived those honest grey eyes and had let the little lady think me something other and better than I was—I who was only a woman utterly empty-handed in the world at large.

And why had I scurried away? Was I afraid, or ashamed to be taken for a woman with an interest in other women's interests? Was it so much nobler to

be taken—as I had allowed myself to be taken by the grey-eyed lady—for a woman whose only interest was *men?* Or, perhaps, nothing at all! But what had she said about "matrimonially superfluous women"—thirty thousand? Impossible! I had misunderstood her—she must have said three thousand. Why, thirty thousand would be an army—an army of superfluous women!

The whole idea of "superfluous" women was a brand-new one to me, and after I recovered from the sting of my personal feelings I experienced a sense of fellowship with women as a class larger than anything I had felt before. Those thirty thousand left-overs somehow belonged as a chapter in my sister-

hood of widows, and were, oh, *so* much more to be pitied because they had never known the blessing of a good man's love and protection.

My eyes at this were suddenly opened to some aspects of the world I had never before considered, for I may as well confess that in the bottom of my heart I had always had distinct contempt for an old maid. I'd taken it for granted that if a woman wasn't married it was her own fault—she hadn't made herself attractive enough to men in general and one nice man in particular. But when you have thirty thousand surplus women, somebody's bound to get left out no matter what they do.

Then thought I: If they simply can't

get husbands to look after their legal interests, who does it for them? Some other woman's husband, who doesn't care a rap about them personally—or oughtn't to?

In one minute, with that before me, my life-long cherished view of the whole question of marrying and getting in marriage underwent reconstruction; and that was the precise minute when I began to be a suffragist! The tide of my mind flowed on from sisterhood to votes for women as the natural consequence of insufficient husbands. For the first time in my life I appreciated the real meaning of "Taxation without representation."

Within another minute or so I had

thought of a dozen questions to put to the grey-eyed girl. I retraced my steps faster even than I had hurried off, but she was nowhere to be seen. All through the neighbourhood I walked; there was no one remotely resembling her.

That day I went home with a new interest, a feeling of zest. My very shame at myself stimulated me—it gave me something to do. Next morning at the same hour I was back on my beat looking for my suffragist, though without success; but the more I thought of her, the more I sought her, the more I felt I simply must find her and explain.

I am, like most of my class and

breed, a person of a good deal of singleness of purpose once my interest is aroused, and finding the grey-eyed girl now became almost an obsession with me. Apart from the questions I meant to ask her, she appealed to something in my own life and traditions. I could talk with her, woman to woman, about insufficient husbands, after I had confessed to her that I, also, was a superfluous woman.

For about two weeks I industriously tramped the neighbourhood where I had first seen her—it never occurred to me to look up any of the various suffrage organisations and find her that way—and I finally discovered her standing on a soap-box! She was address-

ing a small gathering, mostly women that seemed to be of the better paid classes, stenographers, cashiers, and so forth.

I wormed my way through the circle, pushing right and left, until I reached a place directly in front of her. Our eyes met. She recognised me, smiled and slightly bowed, and went on:

". . . You say: 'I am only one. One doesn't count'; and so you don't enroll with us.

"Oh, friends, every one does count! Our ranks are made of one and one, and we need every one.

"Others of you say: 'But I'm so busy; it's all I can do to get along myself. I have no time for anything

outside my regular work.' Are there any here too busy for *interest* in the Cause, in the great woman movement? We need numbers, of course, but still more do we need enthusiastic interest, moral support, public sentiment; and you, friends, are part of that. There's work to be done for the world, but we can't do it unless we have public sentiment back of us to support our efforts. Give your interest, then, if you have no time for anything else.

"Oh, my friends, your help *is* needed, and every one here now can help in breaking the way for the rest to follow. We of this day and generation are the bridge builders into a more beautiful future for those who have so little now.

Our ideals to-day will be the realities of to-morrow. Only let us work for them—work together as one great sisterhood, without class prejudice, or class distinction. Let us work, North, South, East and West, for the common good, each taking part in the woman movement sweeping around the world.

"Every woman is needed, the Southern gentlewoman as much as any." Her eyes were earnestly searching my face and I saw she was appealing especially to me; then she leaned a little forward and spoke directly to me—"Oh, my friend, the cause of woman needs *you!*"

A light that was lightness of spirit, of heart and of understanding broke

upon me. I was needed at last! Countless women, or rather women's lives, seemed pressing around me from all quarters of the globe; women with toil-worn hands and aching backs, carrying the burdens of maternity; lives starved and weary with the struggle for bare existence on the planet; lonely women who could never find a mate; friendless women and cripples—a vast sisterhood of all the women in the world, and I was one of them.

Instantly after, I felt appalled and ashamed that I should be able to live at ease and bemuse myself with grief, while hundreds of thousands—women like me—must work incessantly to keep bread in their mouths; and at the same

time I felt exultant that I was called to help; that I was still in a world that could help. I was needed! "Every one was needed," the speaker said. I was at least one—I *counted* for something.

A salvation feeling flooded me, lifted me out of myself and carried me aloft on its wings. I can think of no other word than "salvation" for what I then experienced. I had the vivifying sense of a *changed life.*

I lost count of time and flowing words until I saw my little grey-eyed friend coming toward me with outstretched hand. I laid mine in hers and said: "I'm so glad! Use me any way you can."

She has told me since the tears were rolling down my cheeks. I did not know it. She slipped her arm through mine and took me with her.

IV

I THOUGHT at first mine was an exceptional, dramatic and almost accidental conversion to the cause of woman suffrage. Talking with other workers I have learned to my surprise it was rather the contrary—that mine was unique only in its extremities of grief and realisations, not in its general pattern, nor in the fervency with which the cause is embraced, once the feeling of the Great Sisterhood of Women takes possession of the imagination. With all converts that appeal is to a basic instinct, *woman's hunger to be needed;*—

an instinct so profoundly embedded in the very fibres of her being that without it she ceases to be woman.

Did you ever think of that instinct?—think how, back to the very dawn of the world, woman has felt herself needed by her young? Yes, even the beasts of the field and the birds of the air feel it too. And when in the dark recesses of her mind she knew her offspring needed food and protection, and she responded to their cries, it was her first conscious recognition of a relationship that had a claim—a claim for a personal service antedating the tribe, the herd, the hunting pack, and taking precedence over all other claims of pack, herd, tribe, nation, society, or the

world at large. For ages piled on ages that instinct has been silently growing, eternally responded to in woman's nature as it never has in man's; and for all those ages that instinct has been almost entirely absorbed and gratified within the four walls of home.

And now it is the world that has changed, not woman; for the plain truth is that the modern home, the modern family with its adjunct schools and tutors of every art, the modern house with its labour-saving devices, the modern industrial community with its division of labour, do not begin to use up the values of the modern woman's life. While the simple life of the up-to-date apartment has been releasing volumes

of energy and active devotion once absorbed in the complicated, house-ridden lives of our grandmothers, present-day woman with her higher education and her ambition for self-improvement has also been acquiring larger and larger values in herself. She now has more to give and less to give it to in her home than her grandmother in hers. Her home labours have shrunk and her world has enlarged, and it is a world with a good many things in it our grandmothers hardly knew the names of—popular magazines and the daily news of everything from pure milk to murder, theatres and symphony concerts, slums, sweatshops, child labour, Browning clubs, domestic economics,

the servant problem, woman's increased earning capacity and financial independence. In other words, ours is a world of far greater variety of pleasures and opportunities and a wider call to our sympathies.

But the change in myself was, I think, much more than a change in point of view; it was an actual development of my psychic nature. And this is true of the entire movement. What we are witnessing to-day is a psychological development, *wholesale:* a primeval instinct is rising like a river out of its bed and overflowing new territory; an instinct that purled along for centuries on the personal plane, contented, stopped by the garden gate; now discontented,

turbulently flooding out into the broad highway of the world. Woman as a class is, as it were, shifting up her centre of gravity; as a class she is entering a different plane of conscious activity and passing from the strictly personal to the impersonal; from concrete interests in material things to abstract interests in ideals. But with all its turbulence, it is at bottom the fidelity to a special tradition lasting through the events of a new existence. We are following a traced way; we are living out our heritage from the mother instinct of the ages — the desire to be needed — bequeathed us in direct succession since mother instinct came into the world.

Instinct!—that is to me the magic word, the key to the mystery of the whole woman movement; that is the invincible, overwhelming force back of it all.

Stop and think what instinct really means. When Nature wants a job done —a big job like keeping alive a species or populating the earth; a job requiring sacrifice and self-effacement and endless work and watching—does she call in reason, argument, philosophy, art, science, religion, economics, or philanthropy? Not a bit of it! She hands that job over to a fundamental instinct and instinct gets that job done. The hardest thing in the world to change is a fundamental instinct, for it will live

on for generations through untold centuries after the natural object of it has disappeared.

In women, the instinct for service has survived a large part of the need for her former specialised services in the home; but that instinct must satisfy itself somewhere. A woman will go through fire and water to give herself to what needs her most; she will sacrifice her comfort, her pleasures, her ambitions, her beauty, her reputation and even her very life, content in the thought she has served a loved one. Literally, she will stop at nothing once the instinct calls her to act, whether the call come from a beloved person, a beloved institution, a beloved cause, or

a beloved ideal. That is what made the suffragists in the beginning; that is what is now turning them wholesale into suffragettes.

I know, as thousands of us know, that no matter what my social traditions, or what my reason tells me, I am now ready to fight;—as ready as the serene old cow is ready to gore the wolf circling her and her calf, or as the timid sparrow is ready to fly at the snake crawling toward her nest and try to peck out his eyes for him. It is the readiness of millions of timid mothers before us. Reason says: "Fly away and save your own feathers"; instinct tells me to stay where I am and fight defending the thing I love, and talk

about it afterwards—if there's anything left of the enemy when I'm through with him! Nor do I need to pray for courage to join the riot, throw stones, scratch faces, tear clothes, or anything else that comes along in the course of defending my ideals—*that* courage was born in me as my woman's heritage of the ages, and trained by every tradition of my personal life and of the South.

And here is the important point, it seems to me, the men and the "antis" are missing in the psychology of the present stage of the woman movement, particularly as it is manifesting in England: When driven to despair of the use of milder methods—despair of argu-

ment with a wolf, or moral suasion with a snake—we start fighting, nerved and spurred to it by one of the oldest instincts in the world—defence of our offspring of body or brain. The instinct has never changed, for those mothers that lacked the instinct to nourish and protect left no offspring in the world; and may Heaven defend us from the woman who isn't womanly enough to stand up and fight, regardless of self-interest, for the thing she loves! The woman who isn't willing to isn't a woman at all; she's only an apology in petticoats.

Realising this now, I frankly glory in being "a creature of instinct." It makes me feel consciously allied, as I

never did before, with the whole living world, one with its primal forces, partaker of its progress, assistant creator of its coming achievements.

V

THE great procession marked the half-way stage between my being a suffragist and a suffragette; it was to me the final loosing of a bondage to an eye-service conventionality. Up to that time I could enthusiastically attend meetings and all that sort of thing, but I couldn't —no, I simply could *not*—go out into the public streets and exhibit myself to the gaping multitude. Gracious no! My little cherished dignity would never allow it! What would my friends think if they saw me? I still cared a great deal what people thought about me,

even if I didn't care a rap for the people who did the thinking. But when my grey-eyed friend said: "Of course you must show yourself with us; you must do your share in the open with the new crusaders, not sit back coddling yourself on cushions within your castle walls while the rest march forth afoot carrying the banner of progress," I got terribly ashamed of my cowardice and went along like a lamb.

The two weeks before the parade I spent mostly in screwing my courage up, notch, notch, notch, with all the noble reasons for my joining in I could lay hands on. Every time I quailed at the picture of little home-loving me afoot in the middle of the

street, I repeated what my friend had said, quoted a text, or took thought unto my forbears that had fought and died for the cause of secession in the South; —none of which made the picture less dreadful, but only kept my mind off it. Up to the last minute I was still inwardly quaking and quailing and shuddering with outraged conventions, though I was in a do-or-die determination when our division gathered at its meeting-place.

Just a lot of women like myself!—a crowd getting more jammed every minute as the hall filled, and every one laughing, chatting, calling back and forth, handclasps and howdy-do's mixed up together, with directions for the

march shooting like rockets through the buzz of voices. Were they all quailing inside, too? They certainly didn't show it and no more would I! The battle was on—die game!

Presently I became conscious of a subtle, vibrant undertone throughout the room, an electric thrill in the words passing among us: "You here?" and the sharp reply: "Of course I'm here!" Some added: "Do you think I'd let this slip?"

As my little grey-eyed friend spied me and shot her question through a smile, I shot back: "Of course I'm here!" and began to feel it wasn't so dreadfully unladylike after all. Indeed, I got quite brave about it

and told myself I was glad I'd come.

A bugle sounded. Almost pell-mell we hurried down to form in line. The band heading our division struck up; the ranks in front of me marked time, swung into step, marched. Before I knew it, I was marking time and moving forward in the great procession.

My heart beat wildly, partly through nervousness, partly through the excitement of the crowd and the music. For some minutes, in front of the throng of strange faces lining the street where we formed, it seemed as if I might faint. Then we wheeled, rank on rank, into Fifth Avenue, and before me, as

far as my eye could reach, stretched that great army of marching women.

With the first block on the Avenue all my nervousness left me; verily, I seemed to be treading air, not the dust of the common roadway. With another block or two, I seemed to be swept entirely out of myself on a resistless tide of aspiration, flowing onward, ever onward, toward the ideal of universal fraternity, its banners borne aloft by women's hands.

You never know until you have been in it the tremendous emotion of a procession marching for a cause—something never experienced in ordinary life that catches you up and sweeps you along with it, tears you out of yourself

and fills you with the strength of hundreds.

For the first time I realised the force of the woman movement gaining headway all over the civilised world; the sheer mass of it in terms of human flesh and blood. Nothing could stay us now.

"'Twere all as well to bid a cloud to stand,
Or hold a running river with the hand."

Individuals among us might fail and fall out of the procession, but countless others were rising up to take our places. The Cause could not fail.

I think one can never be quite the

same again after such an experience. I was not. Somewhere along the line of march I had shed the shackles of convention and left behind my petty self and its withholdings. Thenceforth I felt I could withhold nothing from the Cause —not ease and personal comfort, or money, or dignity, or even reputation. The whole of me had been called out in a burst; I felt too big for the old shell. The old shell pinched my soul!

And from that experience, when we disbanded, I walked away—a suffragette!

VI

THE event that made me admittedly a suffragette I must of necessity touch very lightly here;—enough to say it was a matter the name of which I barely knew, and whose meaning in terms of a life to live I didn't know at all. The case that converted me to militancy was a girl brought from my own State and rescued, running away, half-clothed, half-starved, by my grey-eyed friend. I took the child home until we could decide what to do with her, and thus I heard her story.

Though I learned soon enough it

was the common one, it was my first glimpse into the underworld. I walked the floor almost the entire night, boiling. Remember, I belonged to the "sheltered" classes; I had been outwardly protected as well as inwardly from this knowledge, and when it came, it struck me like a blow between the eyes. Could such conditions exist in a civilised world?—in the same world in which I had lived secure? Little Minnie and my friend left me no manner of doubt about it—this was no unusual thing to happen to an unprotected girl. Worse than that, the laws of all the States set the "age of consent" in a girl's 'teens and so, this poverty-pinched mountaineer's child, unable to read and

write, younger in education, intellect, judgment, knowledge of the world and moral sense than my little dead son of ten—and in my fond eyes he was scarcely more than a baby—this poor starveling girl had been endowed by law with the power to "consent" to her ruin, not knowing what it meant then, or would mean thereafter.

In the fire of my indignation two words were burnt upon my brain—"THE LAWS"—laws made by men for women that must be unmade by women for women.

Up to that period I seem to have thought very little in detail of the legal aspect of the woman movement. I had put it to myself as "working for the

cause of progress," "helpfulness," "the great sisterhood, bettering the conditions of all women," vaguely, and without formulating the betterment in terms of specific laws and statutes on the books. Now it suddenly came home to me that if we were to better anything we must get right down to the laws, and we could do nothing with the laws until we had the ballot. "Votes for women" had been to me sort of halleluiah-and-amen. That night it took on a poignant, insistent, definite meaning, coloured with the tragedy of a little ruined life, better dead a thousand times than living with the memories of its past.

I flamed. Literally, I saw red. Something must be *done!* We women

must stop talking and act! Fight! Throw stones! Do anything, it didn't matter what, so long as we got the vote and could legislate in our own protection and the protection of the children!

The fury of that mood passed off with daylight, but its marks remain with me still, and I am only one of thousands of women who have felt the same at least once in their lives over man's injustice.

I admit it is quite useless for mere man or an anti-suffragist to discuss the situation with me calmly; tell me cold reasons why "it isn't expedient to give woman the unrestricted franchise," or point out "what women haven't yet done in the States where they do vote,

therefore we have every reason to suppose—" and so on, *ad nauseam;* not because I'm deaf to reason, or opposed to calm argument in their place, but because when an instinct boils over it sweeps away reasons and arguments and rushes into action along the open way. Instinct invariably says: *"Do!"* And that is all I think of—Do! Do something, and do it quickly and effectively. Let there be an end of shilly-shallying.

We militant suffragettes feel we are soldiers of the Common Good of Woman, and many of us have reached the place where we are ready to fight and die for the Cause, if our dying will help it one step forward, as our ancestors faced death and fought through

the Civil War or the Revolution for causes they held dearer than life.

But are we fighting now, sex against sex, woman against man? At times it almost seems that way; it feels that way, too, in my moments of indignation at the injustice of some of the man-made laws for us. I have what I certainly never had in my youth—a sense of opposition to the entire sex. I have grown pugnacious, and only the memory of personal loved ones keeps me from becoming bitter toward every creature with a vote that I am deprived of.

And yet to say that we—my friend and I and thousands more suffragettes like us—no longer desire domestic life,

that we wouldn't marry the right man if he properly asked us to, is the absurdity of an infantile mind that doesn't know what women are made of.

Even though a suffragette, I am still a woman as much as I ever was, and more so in some ways. Still, I must say this—I could never marry again on the former terms. I could not now engage to deliver over all my thought, time, energy, devotion, ambition and money to my husband's and my individual interests as I once did; for with the larger development of my mind, the wider horizon opened to my view through suffragism, the sense of great issues and a closer sisterhood, I can no longer regard the home as a purely

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personal affair between two people and their offspring. I see the home now as part of an immense, complicated, embracing whole to which every woman owes a duty; to which she is bound by high moral obligation to render whatever service of work or support in its forward progress she is able to give.

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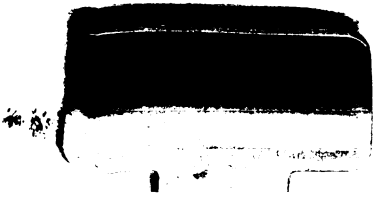
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